

## The 10<sup>th</sup> NOSLLTL 2021

### The 10<sup>th</sup> National Online Seminar on Linguistics, Language Teaching and Literature

## How Powerful Language Could Be in Communication?

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#### Abstract

*This study is a qualitative study that explains how strong language could influence someone's life based on the use of the words in communication. The study used semantics approach in identifying the effective meaning of the words. Language is powerful and a virtue to self-reflection because it is used to communicate in writing, speaking, and even visually. Having language means that we are able to communicate in such a way that others understand us. Language could be in the form of verbal and non-verbal, even sign is also part of it. Language is sound and symbol which is meaningful. It is not only a key component of communication but also a key aspect of identity. Language could shape somebody by means the words we choose to use become a part of who we are. The result of the study shows that the words have the power to raise you, to destroy you, to inspire you, and to anger you. It might take only one word and it has the power to change someone's life. However, language becomes more powerful when understood by a wider community than just those closest to you. Therefore, understanding the meaning of the language is core to the language users to avoid ineffective communication.*

**Keywords:** Powerful, language, communication, semantics.

## INTRODUCTION

Language has always been an important source of communication. It might be any formal system of gestures, signs, sounds, and symbols used or conceived as a means of communicating thought. Not only as communicating thoughts and ideas, but it forges friendships, cultural ties, and economic relationships. It plays a vital role in the process of relationships and shapes reality and it limits what ideas and concepts are available in a particular situation. In all aspects of live we engage with, the meanings are available through language we practice in ways of everyday interactions. Hence, the power of language is derived from its meanings that recognize widely by others.

Language is very powerful that we use it instead of wars. Although most wars start after battle of words, they all end with the aggrieved parties talking to one another eventually. Nevertheless, a war or fight could end with one word. Thus, the impressive words pronounced might result into positive or negative effect. As Miguel (2018, p. 53) says “The word is so powerful that one word can change a life or destroy the lives of millions of people.” In other words, the words have power to raise you, to destroy you, to inspire you, to anger you. Therefore, a well-known sentence is said “Think before you speak” which means your words are a reflection of who you are and having wrong words are getting you into trouble and vice versa.

This paper attempts to describe how powerful language as the medium of communication by concerning to Jackendoff’s mentalist theory of meaning. The theory was aimed at explaining the nature of the conceptual element by which a person understands words and sentences.

The similar studies of language have been done by the experts of linguists. First, the article of Sik Hung Ng and Fei Deng (2017) “Language and power”, this study is about language powers include, the power of language to maintain existing dominance in legal, sexist, racist, and ageist discourses that favor particular groups of language users over others. Another language power is its immense impact on national unity and discord. Also, language power is its ability to create influence through single words (e.g., metaphors), oratories, conversations and narratives in

political campaigns, emergence of leaders, terrorist narratives, and so forth.

The second article was written by Laurie L. Haleta (2009) entitled "Student perceptions of teachers' use of language: The effects of powerful and powerless language on impression formation and uncertainty". This study examined the effects of teachers' language on initial impressions and uncertainty reduction in the university classroom. Language was operationalized using powerful and powerless language forms. Teachers using powerful language were rated significantly higher by students on the dimensions of dynamism, status, and credibility in impression formation than were teachers using powerless language. Significant differences were also found for student perceptions of uncertainty. Students reported significantly higher levels of uncertainty when teachers used powerless language than when teachers used powerful language. The findings suggest that, based on the language teachers use, students form initial impressions which may contribute to subsequent classroom interaction.

The third article was concentrate on sex differences in powerful/powerless language. It was authored by Lindsey M. Grob, Renee A. Meyers, and Renee Schuh (2009) under the title " Powerful/powerless language use in group interactions: Sex differences or similarities?" The paper examines sex differences in powerful/powerless language (interruptions, disclaimers, hedges, and tag questions) in the small group context by juxtaposing two competing theoretical frameworks. A test of five contrasting hypotheses revealed little support for the dominant "dual cultures"; approach for investigating sex differences (i.e., men will use more powerful language while women will employ more powerless language). Instead results were much more supportive of a "gender similarities"; approach to understanding sex differences, showing no significant differences between women and men in their use of interruptions, hedges, and tag questions. The theoretical implications of these findings are discussed for research on sex differences, powerful/ powerless language use, and small group communication.

Likewise, this study has different focus in which it concerns on the power of words in both verbal and non-verbal communication. It deals with the composition process leading from word meanings to sentence information and the building of a semantic discourse representation from a sequence of sentences in a text (or piece

of dialogue). This study is analyzed by bringing in Jackendoff's mentalist theory of meaning in considering the words or sentences from semantics point of view.

Mentalists explain cognitive capacities in terms of cognitive structures in the mind/brain. These structures, though neurally instantiated, are identified by their cognitive functions. Mentalist explanations thus abstract away from details of neural implementation. A mentalist approach to semantics focuses in particular on conceptual structures in the mind/brain and their interfaces with other structures, including specifically linguistic structures responsible for syntactic and phonological competence.

The study of semantics looks at how meaning works in language and the ways in which the meanings of words can be related to each other. In the theory of the mentalist, meaning is seen as a representation (Jackendoff, 1990). Language user creates a mental picture of what they wish to express and use words to communicate them. These ideas or mental representation have already being naturally processed. Learners simply make choices from a range of lexical concepts in their lexicon. Also, it investigates the relationships in language and how the meanings are created, which is an important part of understanding how language works as a whole.

## **METHOD**

This study is a qualitative study which involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994., p. 2). The study used semantics approach of Ray Jackendoff's theory in explaining the nature of the conceptual element by which a person understands words and sentences. The obtained data will be analyzed in the form of descriptive analysis.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. Language as a means of communication**

Crystal (2005, p.277) stated that language is more like an action rather than a

packet of information. Saying, "I believe in you" "I promise you" or "I guarantee" does more than convey meaning. It communicates intent as the speakers committed to a certain course of action, other words, it known talking as doing. For better or for worse, the moment it pronounced, the listeners' emotions were activated as the words gave them inspirations or even discourage them. Those words are sufficiently powerful in common communication, for instance, "I **believe** in you". The word "Believe" semantically indicates that the speaker is putting trust and confidence into who they are or what they can do. Language could be a mean of performing action. The words with particular combination and delivered orally in a certain way would hold on listeners' mind as an affirmation that could arouse, support, and valued them.

Another case is seen from the illustration of traffic lights. The traffic signals are used to control movement of traffic that placed on the road at intersections and crossings. The drivers must understand the traffic protocols because different color of lights tells the drivers what to do. Red, yellow, and green colors employ dissimilar meaning to the car owners. You have to full stop at the red light or you may turn left if you're turning from a one-way street to another one-way street. Whereas, yellow light means slow down and not speed up. This is a warning that a red light is soon to follow. You have two options as you approach a yellow light. In most situations, you should slow down and get ready to stop your vehicle before the light turns red. However, if you're traveling at a relatively high speed, you can choose to speed up and get through the intersection before the light changes. And the green light means you can start driving or keep driving. This understanding is required so the drivers would do accordingly to avoid unwanted traffic jam or accident while traveling around. Thus, the drivers understanding of traffic lights protocol showed how language works and communicate.

## **2. Language as a means of performing actions**

In particular occasion, language could change someone's status by pronouncing certain utterances. It creates influence. For instance, changing someone believe from Christian to Muslim. The utterance that has to pronounce is called syahadat "Asyhadu an laa ilaaha illallah, waasyhaduanna muhammadar rasuulullah" After

pronouncing the utterance, immediately he/she becomes a Muslim. It also happened in the process of marrying someone. The vows took by bride and groom made them as a wife and husband with trusting on the vows they took into account. It is how the language works and performs the action by saying specified words and utterances. As Montgomery (1995, p.192) said that, utterances are capable of performing a wide range of actions.

Similarly, when someone yells or screams “fire” while in workplace or in crowded theater, people around there will express a powerful emotional. Hearing someone yell “fire” means something bad is happened and their cognitive is formed that make them spontaneously running away from the place to save their lives. Their cognitive would be if they stay there, then they will be injured or even they could lose their lives. In this case, a yelled means a warning signal of an accident which publics could worry about.

### **3. Language as a means of entertainment**

Words, gestures, and tone are utilized in union to portray a broad spectrum of emotion. Language also defined as sounds and symbols which is meaningful. Likewise, music is known as an effective way to communicate to the masses that affects us subliminally not only through melody but also through the imagery and language portrayed in lyrics. Ransom (2015, p.11) considering the definition of lyrics as, “words placed to a melody”. Even if they can't put into words what they're feeling upon hearing or listening to said music, the meaning is transferred. For instance, Shakira's hit “Try everything” tells the listeners to never stop trying and giving up on anything they like. In this case, language is used as a mean of entertainment which the listeners' emotions are involved in. This song has been inspired and motivated the listeners as the message reaches them right away that make them experience the sadness, happiness, or even anger.

### **4. Language as a means of maintaining social relationship**

Unlike verbal, facial expressions which non-verbal communication is interpreted as maintaining social relations. As an indication of gentle smile could start a friendship, this nature facial expression is used to voice trustworthiness,

belonging, and good intentions. It functions as social connectors that a smile perceived as a sign of compassion. However, the context of the interaction happened is matter. Nicholas (2017) stated that context is very important in the study of meaning. As a matter of fact, without context, the meaning that an expression makes would be limited to the linguistics meaning expressed by the words contained in the expression. Thus, the situations that surround a text will help in its interpretations.

Briefly, learning a language empowers humans to master an elaborate system of conventions and the associations between words and their sounds on the one hand, and on the other hand, categories of objects and relations to which they refer (Ng and Deng, 2017). After mastering the referential meanings of words, a person can mentally access the objects and relations simply by hearing or reading the words. Apart from their referential meanings, words also have connotative meanings with their own social-cognitive consequences. The instances mentioned above display the meaning that created in the words was mental representation that already being naturally processed in which the listeners or hearer indicate their understanding. The making-meaning process is formed from the way both speaker and listener semantically understand the words and how they represent it into utterances that potentially used as function to perform an action, influence the emotions, and uphold the social relationship.

## **CONCLUSION**

The power of language is unlike any other. Words and language have consequences and great impact to the language users in how we use them. Language could performing an action, it also could entertain, and certainly it able to maintain social relations. Words or language is delivered in a certain way, verbal or non-verbal possibly could touched our senses positive and negatively as it inspire and destroy. The most powerful way to make information accessible, other than by an emotional connection, is through our words, language. Language is what enables humans to humans to get along in understanding one another in the way their mental representation is developed.

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